

## **Part 4**

### **The third stage of my life as business consultant (6-Story 13)**

#### **Whole day in Tennessee truck stop for interviews**

One of the two purposes in Tennessee was to have a reunion with Mr. A. J. Metler, president of Hauling & Rigging, Inc.. We met at the Mikado. He was one time the vice president of the ATA, Inc. The other is visiting one of the truck stops of Flying I, Inc. They have many truck stops throughout the States.

The state of Tennessee reminds me of the good old days when I used to sing American songs, Tennessee's waltz was one of it. When I reached in the airport waiting the cargos come out, someone tapped me on the shoulder behind saying, "Hi, Yuuki!" It was Mr. Metler. He picked me up in his car to take me first of all, to his company. Very few workers are there because of the weekend.

The company trucks are some three hundreds, while the owner operators under the contract are two hundreds. I met his son, Anthony, who is going to be the third president when the time comes. He wore a black leather mesh suspender, which I liked very much. I thought I would buy one before leaving this country.

He then took me to one of his favorite truck stops where I could make interviews with truck drivers next day. He brought me to the manager and explained my motivation for my trying to make the interviews with the truck driver whole day. The manager showed so much interest in my motivation and promised to help me.

The next morning, the 21<sup>st</sup> day of my trip here, I wore the blue training pants with tennis shoes and the ATA white cap with the slogan of "Without trucks America stops" It means, when the trucks ever stop, America and its economy and everything would stop. American people are good at building the corporate slogan in a smart way. I paid respect to the ATA for such wonderful corporate identity. This lead me later days to let the Japan Trucking Associations, Inc. made their own slogan of "Without trucks Japan stops"

It was past 8 am that Mr. Metler sent me to the truck stop and left me there with the appointment time of 6 pm to pick me up. I thus began my interview activities there. The manager, Charley was his name, was kind enough to say to me, whenever I wish, do not hesitate to come to him for talks.

I began to make interviews at random with the drivers. Quite a courage was needed to speak to them. Some brazen faced mind and nerve were needed for speaking to them. Some of them were cowboy styles, heavy hairy faced or big

giant man looking me down giving me some pressure. My first name, Yuuki, sounds “courage” in Japanese. Let’s go with it, I tackled with the interview.

My first interviewee was a past middle aged man, walking in the shop looking around the widows for window shopping or something. In the short talk with him, I knew that he was what we call “team operator”, meaning man-and-wife team owner operator. When I asked where his wife is, he said “Oh, she is waiting in the truck”. I urged him to let me interview his wife. We went out the lot to come to their truck. She was in the front seat as if at loose ends. At our sight, she smiled bashfully like a little girl. I asked her, “How do you like the team operator life?” Her answer was, “Oh, I love it!” No more questions were needed for their interview.

One thing clear and common I felt by talking with them is that all of them have good entrepreneurship for becoming the independent truckers. They have strong will and motivation of “I am a boss”. One of my leading questions to them was “I think the company drivers are more secure and stable. Have you ever wanted to be the one?” The answers were all negative, saying, “Never! I hate to become a company driver, that is why I became independent, you know.”

I tried to speak to some company drivers. My question was, “Have you ever wanted to become the owner operator?” Their answers were “Sure! But I have no money to start the business” I do not remember anyone say he or she likes the company driver better. This is a real story. One thing that I later days noticed was that I never met a black man driver as the owner operator.

Oh, I have one who said he prefers being an employed driver with no hesitation. It was in the ATA convention where I met him. He was a member of what they call “Road Teams” sponsored by the ATA, which comes later. He was a member of the Teamsters. In those days, the average monthly income for the company drivers was some \$33,580, while his was \$50,000. For him, there is no reason why he hates to be the employed driver. For the management, it is foolish to hire that high salaried driver with the same productivity. There lies the downfall of the Teamsters. Those who are not welcomed, there would be fewer place to work. The managements are in the place where they must make high productivity with less labor cost.

Within ten hours, I succeeded in making interviews to some fourteen or fifteen drivers. Before leaving the shop, I met and talked with the manager for a while. When I asked him of his opinion about the owner operators and company drivers, he said like a well matured person, “Well it depends. However, the owner operator is his or her own boss, the

owner regardless of tinny and small, you know.” I could see what he wants to say in his simple words.

Next morning, Mr. Metler came to my hotel again to bring me to his office. I saw many corporate messages on the wall. “Our Commitment to Quality” was the one caught my eyes. It says, though not quite sure of my English memories, “Our first priority is the Customer and its Customer and all the users who use them. We endeavor to cut the cost but never to lose our reputation of the excellency.”

He showed me the weekly bulletin distributed to the company employees and subcontractors. The banner has its message from the bible. Their slogan was “We all make a difference” The differentiation is the very thing needed in the field of commodity and service in modern days. I witnessed it in the home country of capitalism, America.

A few years ago, I tried to check his company to know that the company sold its mail section of heavy hauling.